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ABSTRACT

As administrators, students, and the political machinery make higher education more accountable, assessment has become a relevant and timely topic. Recent interest in assessment and evaluation have brought significant changes in the way that educators in the field of organizational communication judge their students' work. The lecture method is the most preferred approach to teaching the course, but several secondary methods include: alternative media, case studies, simulation games, role playing, videotapes, films, and transparencies. Self-directed teams and internships are also used. Various innovative methods of assessment have emerged--among these a combination of objective and subjective evaluations like formal and/or informal evaluation by the supervisor; self-evaluation; informal evaluation by the faculty; evaluation of a daily log kept by students; and evaluation of students' work or portfolio. While there is a distinction between student assessment and evaluation and curriculum assessment and evaluation, each has an impact on the other. To best evaluate the role the learning environment plays in the development of the organizational communication student, faculty should use four traditional methods: reaction, knowledge, behavior, and results. (Contains 2 tables of data, 1 figure, and 13 references.) (CR)

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ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES IN TEACHING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Running Head: Organizational Communication Assessment

As administrators, students, and the political machinery make higher education more accountable, assessment has become a more relevant and timely topic. The pressure is on to provide assessment to accurately describe student performance and allow for evaluation of the student and the class. This paper examines the trend in assessment in the organizational communication course. The current status of organizational communication education is discussed. The current and past demographics, topics, teaching methods, and assessment techniques are addressed. This paper promotes a model of student and course assessment that is longitudinal and comprehensive in focus. The proposed model for assessment of organizational communication should focus on student reaction, knowledge, behavior, and results. Both qualitative and quantitative methods should be employed to insure comprehensiveness. Future directions of assessment in organizational communication are briefly discussed.

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> "In the 1980s we have witnessed an expansion...of scholarly writing which attests to the growing maturity of organizational communication as a subdiscipline in the larger discipline of communication" (Michal-Johnson, 1988, p. 2)

> "Finding ways to effectively assess student learning is crucial in the field of communication" (Aitken, 1994, p. 2)

Assessment and evaluation have long been topics of interest in higher education. Recent interest in assessment and evaluation have brought significant changes in the way that educators judge students' work. The field of organizational communication has had changes in the way that faculty perform student assessment and evaluation. As Michal-Johnson and Pace (1983) reflect, organizational communication has undergone transformation as new topics are introduced regularly (within their 10 year timeframe). Thus, the challenge for the organizational communication faculty member is even more pressing: assess and evaluate students on topics that are evolving. Unique forms of assessment and evaluation, though risky and time consuming, offer faculty deep insight into what students are retaining.

Current Status of Organizational Communication Education

As a relatively new discipline (Daniels & Spiker, 1994), organizational communication has rapidly taken hold in communication departments across the nation. The demographics, topics, teaching methods, and assessment/evaluation methods of organizational communication distinguish this class from other classes in the communication curriculum.

Demographics of the Organizational Communication Classroom

In Pace's (1988) survey of colleges offering the basic course in organizational communication several interesting findings emerged. Pace concluded that more students were taking the basic course even though class size seemed to be stable at 11 to 50 students. Some colleges reported larger classes. Pace also noted that the number of faculty prepared to teach the basic course in organizational communication at the average institution had increased as well. More schools required organizational communication for their majors and overall numbers of communication majors increased. Overall, the report that Pace gave indicated that organizational communication is a course that is taken by more and more communication majors and supported by increased numbers of teaching faculty comfortable with the course.

Topics in the Organizational Communication Classroom

Pace and Ross (1983), Pace (1988) and Michal-Johnson (1988) rank ordered a list of possible topics that are addressed in the basic organizational communication course. Table 1 lists

the topics that were most popular in 1979 and 1988 to show the comparative changes in topics over that span. Table 1 omits the topics that were about the course (syllabus/orientation and examinations) focusing specifically on topics that were addressed in the course in 1979 and 1988.

Table 1

Rank Ordered Topics in the 1979 and 1988 Basic Organizational Communication Classroom

Ranking	1979 Topic	1988 Topic
1	Communication Networks	Informal/Grapevine Communication
2	Informal/Grapevine Communication	Network Analysis
3	Communication Climate	Communication Climate
4	Communication Theory/Models	Organizational Culture
5	Organization Theory	Conflict/Conflict Management
6	Leadership	Organizational Change
7	Management Styles	Communication Load
8	Organizational Communication Theory	Leadership
9	Motivation Theory	Management Styles
10	Conflict/Conflict Management	Superior/Subordinate Comm
11	Decision Making	Communication Theory/Models
12	Network Analysis	Organization Theory
13	Interpersonal Communication	History of Organizational Comm
14	Small Groups	Nonverbal Behavior
15	Communication Load	Organizational Climate
16	Communication Auditing/Analysis	Communication Rules
17	Organizational Effectiveness Criteria	International/Japanese Management
18	Nonverbal Behavior	Organizational Effectiveness Criteria
19	Intergroup Relations	Decision Making
20	Organizational Change	Message Fidelity

Pace concluded that the topics addressed in the basic course seem to be emerging and changing. According to Pace's (1988) analysis, one-third of the topics were consistent from 1979 to 1988 while the other two-thirds of the topics changed. Michal-Johnson (1988) also concurred with Pace's analysis suggesting that there was change. This changing focus led Pace to conclude "Although the topics in the basic course in organizational communication appear to have some stability, emphases seem to vary a great deal and new topics are being introduced" (1988, p. 16). Even Pace and Ross (1983) suggested that the topics were emerging rapidly, but there were commonalities in the field. Michal-Johnson explained the reason for the change in terms of maturity and continuing interest in the field. Mills (1988) also suggested that organizational communication has a common theoretical base, but from that point there is no clear pattern in the content of textbooks. Driskill and Polansky (1994) discussed the topics used in their self-directed classes, there was significant overlap between the 1988 topics and their own. Their curriculum consisted of organizational culture, audit, information flow, conflict management, and motivation. These authors also suggested that the number of topics that were addressed were diminished due

to the self-directed focus of the class. One could reasonably conclude that topics in the organizational class are emerging to meet the interests of students and faculty and that more changes should expected as new and different areas of interest occur.

As a final note of interest, research by Pace and Ross (1983) indicated that topics addressed in the basic course differ by experience level in the classroom. Table 2 indicates the topics most often selected by Associate/Full Professors versus Assistant Professor/Instructors.

Table 2

Ranking of Course Content According to Faculty Status

Rank	Assistant Professor/Instructor	Associate/Full Professor
1	Leadership	Organizational Communication Theory
2	Communication Networks	Communication Networks
3	Organization Theory	Communication Climate
4	Communication Audit/Analysis	Communication Theory/Models
5	Organizational Change	Organizational Theory
6	Communication Climate	Leadership
7	Information/Grapevine Comm	Decision Making
8	Management Styles	Management Styles

The shift in topics seems especially compelling given the trend that Pace (1988) noted. Pace found that more faculty are prepared to teach the basic course than in 1979. Pace's findings seem even more powerful especially if the assumption is made that "junior" faculty have different tastes in topics than do more experienced faculty.

Teaching Methods Used in the Organizational Communication Classroom

Michal-Johnson (1988) discussed the topic of teaching methods in the basic organizational communication classroom. In her analysis, the predominant teaching method was the lecture method. She explained, "By the paucity of responses in this category, we can only assume the lecture method is categorically the most preferred approach to teaching the course and that alternative strategies are underutilized" (p. 6). Of the other methods employed in the basic organizational communication course several seem to emerge as being used secondary to lecture. Of these secondary methods, alternative media, cases studies, simulation games, role playing, videotapes, films, and transparencies are more preferred than computer assisted instruction, labs, in-basket exercises, coaching, slides, and flipcharts. Michal-Johnson also noted that in 1988 there was no widespread effort to mediate the basic organizational course.

Michal-Johnson also discussed the specific requirements of the basic organizational course. She specifically concluded that there was differentiation between colleges in terms of the number or oral and written assignments required. Mills (1988) suggested that instructors emphasize diagnostic work to help students understand the communication within the various organizational layers. Kamalipour (1991) spelled out the requirements used in the internship program used to teach organizational communication. Driskill and Polansky (1994) addressed the use of self-directed teams in the basic course suggesting that implementing self-directed teams,

though involving some drawbacks, promotes rich experiential learning for students.

The idea that seems to emerge out of literature on the methods of teaching organizational communication suggests that faculty have a diverse repertoire of instructional tools, but often choose to use lecture as a primary means of instruction. Some innovative colleges have adopted unique and diverse methods like self-directed teams and internships, but they are the minority. The focus on lecture can only be further promoted as the number of students taking organizational communication rises disproportionate to the number of sections offered.

A further implication of the research on organizational communication methods centers around the specific requirements asked of students. For the intern, the workload is entirely different than the student taking organizational communication in the traditional classroom. Work outputs from the self directed team is different from individuals (Driskill & Polansky, 1988) and Michal-Johnson suggested that faculty dedicate time to traditional examinations, papers, and oral assignments.

Assessment in the Organization Communication Classroom

Various innovative methods of assessment in the basic organizational communication course have emerged in this relatively young field. From the relative recency of the field one might infer that assessment methods were equally innovative. That assumption is probably incorrect. The research by Michal-Johnson seems to prove that as late as 1988 examinations were still a significant method of assessing students in the basic organizational class. Over 95% of the respondents used 2 to 3 class periods for examinations, they were the most often noted activity taking at least three class periods in Michal-Johnson's study.

Some notable studies indicate that other less traditional methods of assessment are emerging as useful tools. Kamalipour (1991) explored the assessment of student interns in organizational communication. Those findings seem to suggest that students outside the traditional classroom may be an important method to help students apply the knowledge that they get from traditional educational settings. In the past, however, internships have been cut loose to do what they wish in an agency. Kamalipour advocated that the internship advisor has the responsibility to organize, define, and mentor the students activity. More important to this topic, however, is that the advisor has to assess student learning in the nontraditional setting via nontraditional methods. Kamalipour listed several devices utilized in the assessment of students including a combination of objective and subjective evaluations like formal and/or informal evaluation by the supervisor, self-evaluation, informal evaluation by the faculty, evaluation of a daily log, and evaluation of the students work/portfolio.

Aitken (1994) suggested that assembling a student portfolio is an effective method of assessment. Aitken contended that the portfolio provided the best method of overall assessment of student performance, "Through experimentation with a locally developed measure, nationally normed tests, portfolios, and other techniques, we found that student portfolios may be the best solution to give an informative and nonpolitical assessment of student competencies" (p. 2). Aitken's experience with portfolio assessment were directly linked to assessment in the organizational communication classroom because a portion of the overall student portfolio was derived from a collection of materials generated through the organizational class. Little research has pointed to portfolio as the sole or even the dominant method of assessment in the

organizational communication classroom.

Driskill and Polansky (1994) discussed new methods of empowering organizational communication students through the use of self-directed teams. Driskill and Polansky's methods of assessing self-directed teams provides rich data for those interested in assessment of teaming and autonomous work groups. First, Driskill and Polansky assigned the development of an assessment instrument that included behavioral, cognitive, and affective measures to be administered near the beginning and at the end of the course. Second, Driskill and Polansky noted that the self-directed teams performed a communication audit of the entire class. The audit and the resulting assessment data was used to both illustrate the value of the audit and assess the communication in the classroom. Third, motivation and conflict management surveys were distributed for processing by the groups. Driskill and Polansky noted that there was a heightened degree of metacommunication regarding the processing of the class. Their conclusions were encouraging: empowering students through self-directed teams challenges traditional methods and empowers new creative methods to emerge in their place. As Driskill and Polansky noted, assessment of the newer methods can be a collaborative approach between faculty and student that promotes open assessment rather than assessment left to the faculty member alone.

Toward Better Assessment: A Framework That Works!

At the outset we draw a distinction between student and curriculum assessment and evaluation. Clearly, each type of assessment and evaluation impacts the other. Both processes are integral to the effective assessment of organizational communication students. Brungardt and Crawford (1995) noted that assessment and the subsequent evaluation of organizational communication must focus on both student and curricular elements to provide a more comprehensive view of the utility of the class to current and future students. It's important to understand that while closely related, *assessment* and *evaluation* are different (Brungardt & Crawford, in press). Each plays a critical role in the overall system. Assessment is the collection and measurement of data, while evaluation is the judgment of that data. In many cases, student assessment comes in the form of self-administered reports or surveys. Students in the organizational communication classroom are often asked to complete examinations suggesting that the concept can be measured by more formal means as well. Student assessment is often done in a formal setting like a classroom or training center, but can be done informally also. Student evaluation includes data from pre-assessment, in-class measure, or post-assessment that attempts to judge student learning. Student evaluation is directed toward helping the student understand and draw conclusions about their level of competence in organizational communication. The evaluation of students can be collaborative between student and instructor or done simply by the instructor (Driskill & Polansky, 1994).

Curriculum evaluation is the comprehensive effort used to characterize the utility of the specific class rather than one individual within the class. Student evaluation is specific to the level of understanding of the individual, while curricular assessment and evaluation is interested in the general attributes of the population (Brungardt & Crawford, in press). Student and curricular evaluation often co-exist as Aitken noted, but the purposes of each make the distinction between the two very clear. Curriculum evaluation is ultimately about the utility of the organizational

communication course within the broader communication major. Curriculum assessment often takes the form of extended survey forms asking past, present, and potential students about their expectations in regards to organizational communication. Rather than solely testing students, curriculum assessment attempts to gauge interest and the long term applicability of the theories and practices students learned or want to learn. While student assessment is relatively finite given the fact that there are limits to assessment of an individual student, curriculum assessment is generally never fully complete because of the extensive needs analysis that takes place when classes and majors are changed and reconstructed.

Within a new framework of assessment, multiple assessment methods (including qualitative and quantitative data) should be employed to measure reaction, knowledge, behaviors, and results (Brungardt & Crawford, 1995; Brungardt & Crawford, in press). In designing the assessment and evaluation system, we realize that the more assessment methods utilized, the more effective our overall evaluation process is likely to be. Since the purposes and functions of both quantitative and qualitative approaches are different both should be utilized to complement the weakness of each other. Narrative comments from qualitative methods like instructor evaluations (curriculum assessment) also provide explanations, meanings and elaborations (Patton, 1987). Another methodological approach that should be included is the adoption of the longitudinal philosophy of assessment. Faculty should monitor the improvement of knowledge and skills in organizational communication over an extended period of time. The usefulness of a one time assessment, of either curriculum or students, is not fair to either party. It is our philosophy that assessment be a continuous, ongoing process to insure the most comprehensive assessment and subsequent evaluation possible. A comprehensive system of assessment should include assessment activities at both short-term and long-term stages. Longitudinal methods more accurately measure lasting improvements in organizational effectiveness (Simonds, 1988).

To best evaluate the role the learning environment plays in the development of the organizational communication student, faculty should adopt Kirkpatrick's (1976) four traditional methods of evaluation: *reaction*, *knowledge*, *behavior*, and *results* (Figure 1). These forms of assessment measure both knowledge and skill; the two key elements in developing any competency. The *reaction* method is a recognized way to gather feedback on program activities. Usually used in a post-activity format, this assessment tool asks for reactions or attitudes towards classroom experiences. While this method is useful in identifying participants' feelings, Kirkpatrick stresses the importance of going further in the assessment process. The *knowledge* method refers to the assessment of the participants' comprehension of the facts, issues, techniques and theories of organizational communication. In this instance, self-reporting objective data is typically used along side the standard examination. Comparing pre-test and post-test scores provide the information needed to evaluate the student's mastery level. Assessing whether the educational experience and knowledge learned translates into effective organizational communication brings us to the *behavior* method. The central focus of this assessment activity concentrates on whether changes in the students' behavior was a result of class activities. Again, a self-reporting quantitative approach is used to evaluate changes in behavior. Finally, do changed behaviors *result* in tangible outcomes? This last assessment tool is difficult to measure in the traditional classroom due to the lack of longitudinal focus. It can be, however, the strongest evidence of the efficacy of student learning. The implementation of a departmental survey goes beyond the

individual participant perception and examines his/her organizational successes over the long run.

Figure 1

Assessment and Evaluation Framework for Organizational Communication Classes

REACTION (qualit./quantit.)	**KNOWLEDGE** (quantitative)	**BEHAVIOR** (quantitative)	**RESULTS** (qualit./quantit.)
Instruments:	*Instruments:*	*Instruments:*	*Instruments:*
- Course/Instructor evaluation - In-class group discussion - Formal and informal interviews - Attitude survey	- Comprehensive pretest - Unit examinations - Assignments - Comprehensive posttest - Internship feedback - Ethnography	- In class discussions - Assignments - Mock arguments/ debates - Self-report of critical incident - Role playing - Internship feedback - Ethnography	- Informal interviews - Departmental assessment - Portfolio assessment - Success in other classes or career
Implementation:	*Implementation:*	*Implementation:*	*Implementation:*
- Intermittent times in the semester - Postsemester feedback	- Beginning of class - 5th, 10th, and 15th weeks of semester - Final Exam period	- Throughout the semester - Approx. 10-12 opportunities for activity	- After completion of the class - 2-4 years after graduation

Adapted from Brungardt and Crawford (in press)

This model has provided a sketch of the process of assessment and evaluation for the basic organizational communication course. We would be quite remiss without adding the following caution: assessment and evaluation of students and curriculum is an ongoing process, this snapshot is just a record of that process. Assessment and evaluation, like the process of learning, is never totally complete. To represent assessment data as "the" reality is not justified given the above caution.

Organizational Communication Assessment and Evaluation: The Future

As the need for academic accountability increases, the importance of assessment and subsequent evaluation expands as well. Understanding, adopting, and implementing a comprehensive model of assessment cannot guarantee accountability. But as Aitken noted, the data is a demonstration of a more connected process rather than a "two exams and you're out" philosophy. Assessment has encountered dramatic changes in the last 10 years with the implementation (or adaption) of portfolios into the college environment. Driskill and Polansky's

methods of evaluation point the field in a direction toward joint responsibility of assessment and empowering students to take a greater role in the process of assessment. Kamalipour's work also suggested that assessment can easily extend past the ivory towers of academe. Aitken discussed the use of new CD-ROM technology in maintenance of student portfolios. Without doubt, the future of assessment is as rich as the great need to adopt/adapt new techniques to the organizational classroom. Student and administrator demands will insure that assessment is taken seriously and advances in concert with changes in the organizational communication class.

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